

# Devotional Studies

## The Gospel of Christ and Growth in the Christian Community

Christians are striving for growth in spiritual strength as well as numbers. Many congregations have set objectives for growth in church attendance by the end of this year (2006). In order to reach one's objective in church growth, one must recapture the very heart of church growth—the Good News of God's way of salvation by grace through faith in God's Son. In other words, one's first loyalty must be to the Good News of God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ. As one reflects upon Christianity, one must remember that historic Christianity is first and foremost a Gospel, that is to say, the proclamation to the world the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus. When one announces the Gospel of God, one declares something that God has done for lost humanity in and through Jesus. Just a casual reading of the Synoptic Gospels reveals the essential meaning of the word *Gospel*, who is Jesus, the Messiah. He not only came preaching the Gospel, He, Himself, is the Gospel. Jesus not only brought Good News from God, but He was God's Good News to the world. As one reflects upon the content of the Good News of God, one must call attention to His Death, His Burial, and His Resurrection.

If one wishes to capture the hearts of men and women, one needs to remember the very core and heart of the Gospel. The Gospel is about Jesus and His finished work upon the Cross for redemption. It is not a code of ethics or a philosophy of life; it is Good News about God's redemptive act in Christ. No, the Gospel is not a theology of ethics or a code of laws or a fastidious, or exacting, pattern for a so-called worship service with five prescribed rituals. It is Jesus! Christ is at the heart and center of the Gospel. The Gospel is a personal message to the world. The Gospel is not a doctrine or way of life, but rather, it is the Good News about a Person and what that Person has done for humanity in its wretched and bleak condition (**Galatians 1:3-4**). The Gospel is the revelation of God in history. In the Gospel, God entered time. Even though the Gospel includes the life of Jesus, nevertheless, it is not a biography. Even though the Gospel includes the ethical teachings of Jesus, yet these teachings are not the Gospel itself. The Gospel is the Good News that God has come for the redemption of the world (**John 3:16-18**).

Within the Body of Christ, one is cognizant that the “body of Christ” is the visible manifestation of the Incarnation. This fellowship in the Gospel is more than just a voluntary association of like-minded people who have banded together for convenience or expediency; it is the Body of Christ. Christianity stands or falls on the Gospel of God. One can say that the Gospel of Christ is the source of all true theology; it is the motive behind all Christian ethics; it is the theme of preaching; it is the charter of evangelism; and it is the bond of fellowship among all God's people. Bear in mind, the Gospel is Good News because God has come in Jesus Christ for the emancipation of lost humanity.

In the New Testament writings, one perceives that “preaching the Gospel” had to do with making known the Good News of God in Christ.

Unfortunately, many Christians have confused their brand of instructions with the Gospel of God. As a result of false identification, one witnesses the idolizing of dogmas as Gospel. Thus, orthodoxy has blinded some believers to the glory of God in the face of Jesus who is Gospel. Numerous Christians are confused about what the Gospel of God is all about. As one reflects upon the Gospel, one beholds the eternal God revealed in history. Since the Gospel is the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, one is under obligation to evangelize. Evangelism is a mandate handed down by Christ to His disciples. It is a Divine imperative. Evangelism is not just the privilege of the so-called clergy; it is for the body of Christ as a whole. Every child of God is to be involved in this business of evangelism. There are no exceptions to this Divine imperative. In other words, there is no graduated hierarchy of privilege and responsibility so far as evangelism is concerned. Christians cannot and must not delegate this task to a selected few. Within the New Testament writings, one discovers the priesthood of all believers. There is no gap between clergy and laity. Every child of God is clergy, so to speak.

If the community of Christ, or the church, is to grow, believers must recapture the spirit of evangelism of the early church. Some groups of believers are exclusive rather than inclusive concerning fellowship. For some the word *church* suggests its own distinctive fellowship or denomination. The new humanity of God recognizes that the New Testament does not speak of the “church” as an institution or an ecclesiastical organization. The church is the visible token of the Incarnation, which is to say, the church is the visible manifestation of God in the flesh. In other words, in the church, one sees the Eternal in a person, namely, Jesus. Once more, Christians need to bear in mind that the church is not an institutional structure; it is a holy Christian people. The church is simply Christ living in His people, both men and women. In the New Testament, one observes the following emphasis: the church is the gathered people of God. Some want to identify the church as assent to correct doctrinal teachings about a so-called worship service, that is, a worship service concerning the performance of five ritualistic acts. As a result, certain believers associate “correct doctrine” as equivalent to faith in Christ who is the Gospel of God. Today, the body of Christ is rent asunder by divisions of all kinds. Christians need to recapture the emphasis of the New Testament about the church—the church is the gathered people of God. The church is simply Christ living in His people.